

COUNTY: GLOUCESTERSHIRE

SITE NAME: SWANPOOL WOOD AND
FURNACE GROVE

DISTRICT: FOREST OF DEAN

Status: Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) notified under Section 28 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981.

Local Planning Authority: GLOUCESTERSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL, Forest of Dean District Council

National Grid Reference: SO 541107

Area: 13.59 (ha.) 33.6 ac.

Ordnance Survey Sheet 1:50,000: 162

1:10,000: SO 51 SW

Date Notified (Under 1949 Act): –

Date of Last Revision: –

Date Notified (Under 1981 Act): 1984

Date of Last Revision: –

Other Information:

New site. Within the Wye Valley Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty.

Reasons for Notification:

The woodlands of the lower Wye Valley form one of the most important areas for woodland nature conservation in Britain, comparable with the Caledonian pinewoods, the oceanic oakwoods of western Britain, the New Forest and the mixed coppices of East Anglia. Semi-natural woodland is abundant and virtually continuous along the gorge. The woods are a mixture of many types, some of which are very localised, eg lime-sessile oak stands on limestone; beech stands on both acid and alkaline soils in which lime *Tilia* spp. elm *Ulmus* spp., oak *Quercus* spp. and other species share dominance. Most woods are a rich mixture of stand types, which are believed to be similar in composition to the original natural woods of the valley. Many rare and local species are present, including some of the rarest native tree species eg large-leaved lime *Tilia platyphyllos*, whitebeams *Sorbus* spp., and trees close to the edge of their European range, eg hornbeam *Carpinus betulus* and beech *Fagus sylvatica*. Furthermore, these woods sit in a matrix of unimproved grassland and other semi-natural habitats which, together with the woods, make the Wye Valley one of the most diverse, rich and attractive areas of southern Britain.

Swanpool Wood and Furnace Grove form a single block of ancient broad-leaved woodland, the vegetation reflecting the calcareous nature of the underlying soils. Most of the site lies over Carboniferous limestone shales, with Old Red Sandstone outcropping in the west.

The relict coppice which makes up the woodland consists mainly of ash *Fraxinus excelsior*, small-leaved lime *Tilia cordata* and hazel *Corylus avellana* with occasional birch *Betula* spp. and oak standards. Alder *Alnus glutinosa* is common on the damper soils associated with the streams and flushes in the north-east of Swanpool Wood. Wych elm *Ulmus glabra*, formerly abundant through the site, is now mostly dead. The ground flora includes abundant bramble *Rubus fruticosus*, dog's mercury *Mercurialis perennis*, bluebell *Hyacinthoides non-scriptus*, male fern *Dryopteris filix-mas* and ivy *Hedera helix* with, in places, stands of harts-tongue fern *Phyllitis scolopendrium* and wavy hair-grass *Deschampsia cespitosa*. Several uncommon species have been recorded, including herb paris *Paris quadrifolia*, greater butterfly orchid *Platanthera chlorantha* and narrow-leaved bitter-cress *Cardamine impatiens*.

Swanpool Wood has recently been felled to allow natural regeneration of the coppice and management work is also planned for Furnace Grove.